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REPORT OF THE COMMISSION ON ITS TWENTY-SIXTH SESSION

Draft report

Addendum

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Chapter ___. TECHNICAL COOPERATION

Coordination issues related to the National Household Survey Capability Programme, the Social Dimensions of Adjustment Project and the Living Standards Measurement Study

1. The Commission considered item 11 (d) of its agenda at its 446th meeting, on 11 February 1991. It had before it the reports of the Secretary-General on progress in implementation and co-ordination of the National Household Survey Capability Programme (E/CN.3/1991/26, paras. 12-28 and 54-56) and on progress made in the development of a coordinated United Nations system database for selected social statistics and indicators of common interest and the development of related national databases (E/CN.3/1991/20, paras. 44-46) and the report of the World Bank on World Bank initiatives in the design of permanent integrated household surveys (E/CN.3/1991/27).

2. During the discussion under agenda items 9 (c), 11 (a), 11 (b), 11 (c) and 11 (d), the Commission expressed a high level of concern about coordination of survey programmes and for social statistics and indicators. It stressed the importance attached to the need for effective coordination, collaboration and integration among the many survey programmes that compete for scarce resources within a country, while recognizing at the same time the fact that different surveys originate from different sources and with different objectives. The

Commission stressed the need for improved coordination at the country level, among the international organizations and between countries and international organizations with a view to delivering support to countries in an efficient way and with clarity and to make the best use of scarce resources at the national and international levels to meet national needs. Coordination was needed at all stages of survey work, including setting goals, providing technical advice on measurement and conduct of surveys, selecting indicators and determining methods of compiling them, implementing surveys and organizing funding, with the particular aim of avoiding duplication in data collection.

3. Concern was also expressed at the possibility of countries being presented with statistical systems that could not be sustained beyond the life of the programme. The representative of the World Bank explained that programmes such as SDA and NHSCP have different objectives and it would be wrong to view the two programmes as being in competition.

4. The Commission recognized the significant efforts that had been made to improve coordination and the successes that had been achieved, as set out in the reports and supplemented orally by the organizations involved and members of the Commission. Successful collaboration had been carried out, for example, in Pakistan between NHSCP and the Living Standards Measurement Study (LSMS) of the World Bank, and also in Ghana between NHSCP and the SDA project, because priorities were determined by the respective Governments. The Commission, nevertheless, considered that such instances of coordination were an exception and, on the whole, arrangements for coordination were inadequate and efforts at coordination needed to be reinforced significantly.

5. The Commission recognized that the main internationally sponsored survey programmes were relatively new, dynamic and covered fields of interest of several international organizations. Coordination of the survey programmes was being addressed within specific forums established for NHSCP, LSMS and SDA and the programme for monitoring the achievement of social goals as indicated in the reports. They had also been addressed in the ACC Sub-Committee on Statistical Activities, the overall mechanism for coordination among the international statistical organizations. Overall arrangements for coordination had been developed but problems still arose and were dealt with individually. The Commission noted the positive experiences with coordination involving joint work or well coordinated parallel work between NHSCP and LSMS during the past two years, as reported by several countries, regional commissions and other organizations. The situation with SDA was more complex and, although mechanisms exist for coordination and joint missions had been undertaken with some success, there remained considerable scope for improvement.

6. The Commission recalled the suggestion made by the Chairman under agenda item 9 (c) to establish a group for review of coordination of technical cooperation in statistics and its applicability to survey programmes. Several members stressed the important role the regional commissions play in relation to both the operational and coordination aspects of survey programmes and noted that the Addis Ababa Plan of Action for Statistical Development in Africa in the 1990s specifically recognized the need to improve coordination of all statistical development programmes at the national and international levels. Improvements in coordination in relation to LSMS in the ECLAC region were welcomed.

7. Many members of the Commission considered that for coordination to be effective it had to be at the country level and experiences of several countries had confirmed this. The aims of effective coordination were to avoid duplication and undue pressure on national capability to achieve a well-balanced and stable statistical programme. The fact that donors sometimes needed data for their own operational purposes had to be taken into account and reconciled with country needs. The point was made that arrangements had been established at the institutional level and that these had to be supplemented now with concrete actions at the country level. Successful cooperation depended on openness, goodwill and the elimination of competition, with efforts aimed at a common purpose, namely the advancement of statistical capability at the national level. Both the World Bank and the Statistical Office of the United Nations Secretariat expressed their readiness to renew their efforts in a positive spirit of cooperation.

8. One specific way to promote coordination at the country level and assist countries in decisions relating to survey programmes was to provide to Governments a list of the various survey programmes and their major features, including advantages and disadvantages. Countries would then be able to make decisions and choices based on their particular needs and problems and establish the coordination steps required.

Action taken by the Commission

9. The Commission:

(a) Noted with deep concern that a number of problems in coordination among various technical cooperation initiatives in the field of household surveys still remained;

(b) Welcomed the action that had already been taken to improve coordination of survey programmes at the national and international level;

(c) Noted with satisfaction the progress that had been achieved in coordination with LSMS and NHSCP;

(d) Noted the progress that had been made in coordinating SDA activities with other statistical programmes, more particularly, NHSCP, noted the complexity of some of the issues and emphasized that there was scope for further improvement;

(e) Stressed that additional concrete steps should be taken by the organizations involved to improve coordination of survey programmes and in particular stressed the importance of regular joint and simultaneous missions, exchange of information and further efforts to coordinate programmes at the country level as the means for enhancing cooperation.